

every breath you take by ceruleanstorm

Series: (something strange in your neighborhood) [7]

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M, Nightmares, Slushies, angst! Angst! Angst! Angst!, anything goes guys!, clapping my hands like a seal;, comforting one another, definitely some lumax in here to come, engaged mike and el, grown up Mike and El, having an actual party, just send em in, karen and ted wheeler both had affairs, laundry mishaps, like what the hell duffer bros you think you're actually gonna get away with them not being friends, max and el actually being friends, mike and el being teenage dorks, mike pouting, mike totally knows about how billy flirted with his mom, mileven shenanigans, mourning bob newby (super hero), of course, prompts, sorry had to do it for the drama, steve being the best babysitter ever, the party, wearing each others clothes, whatever you want just send it in to my tumblr!

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Max (Stranger Things), Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper, Max/Lucas Sinclair

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Summary:

there are complexities in love but there is always each other

prompts and one shots for this season.

chapter four: El's done something unspeakable

chapter five (sequel to chapter 4) : Mike has to go home.

1. "stop being grumpy, it's lame"

Author's Note:

so while i'm fixing the plot wholes in "you are the best thing that's ever been mine" i thought i should take some prompts.

there's a list on my tumblr of prompts and if you want to send anything just hmu there @sstrangerthaneleven.

"You little shits owe me for this, you know that right?"

"Do you want that 30 bucks or not, dude?" Dustin rolls his eyes at Steve. He's trying not to lean too far out the door for fear of being caught, either by a tipsy Mrs. Wheeler brandishing a wine glass or Mr. Wheeler, who was completely useless.

"Fine. Whatever. But I'm raising my price to forty." Steve smirks, holding his hand out.

"What the hell? We agreed on *thirty*." taking the precious cash away from Steve's reach, Dustin shakes his head and takes a step back.

Steve puts his hands on his hips, earning an eye roll from Dustin. "You want me to do this or not? I mean it's not like I'm going against the Chief or anything. Oh wait- I *am*."

"DUSTIN? YOU COMING DOWN TO THIS PARTY OR WHAT?" they hear Max yell from the basement.

"Time's running out..." Steve clicks his tongue and Dustin hands over another ten dollars.

"This better be worth *every* penny, Harrington!"

"Trust me," Steve winks, "it will be."

Dustin, with one last eyeroll, slams the door shut and turns on his heel, heading for the basement.

“Where were you?” Mike asks as Dustin flops on the couch. His friend is wearing one of those ugly birthday hats that his mom bought for them, and Dustin has to admit, he does look dumb. The grimace on his face is apparent and he’s rolling his eyes so far back in his they might as well have gotten stuck back there.

“Doing business.” is all Dustin admits before leaning away from Mike to whisper, “By the way, you guys owe me another ten dollars!”

When Mike takes no notice to his secret sleuthing, Dustin realizes Mike’s pouting has reached a whole ‘nother level. He pokes the other boy in the shoulder and Mike flicks him. “Dude you look like someone killed your dog.”

“Are you really going to act this bummed out the whole night?” Lucas asks from his place on the floor. He’s wearing a party hat as well, but it looks slightly less dumb, tilted on its side.

“Yeah, stop acting grumpy.” Max adds, “it’s lame.”

“Not as lame as you” Mike whispers under his breath and when everyone including Max sends a threatening his way he throws his hands up in surrender and yells “kidding! I’m just not in the mood for this stupid party cause-”

“Cause El’s not here? We know.” Will pats him on the shoulder. Apparently the smallest and youngest of their group was the only one who had any sense not to wear one of the hats.

“I should’ve had a party at the cabin. That way we could actually all hang out together. But no, my mom just *had* to have it here.” Mike sighs, ripping the hat off his head.

“Mike, we’ll get to hang out with her soon.” Max shakes her head. “I know the Chief said she had to lay low for a few more months until they can get that military guy from D.C off their backs, but it’s not like you’re never going to see her again.”

“Easy for you to say, you had a sleepover with her last week!” Mike points out.

Max nods in remembrance. “And we talked shit about you guys all

night.”

“It’s different for you guys, I haven’t been able to see her in six weeks.”

“Okay, but part of that was your own fault.” Dustin reminds him, and it earns him a glare from the rest of his friends. “What, you didn’t have to sneak out and then get grounded for also stealing meatloaf from your mom.”

“It was a casserole.”

“Right. But you only have... four more weeks to go?”

Mike put his head in his hands and groaned.

“Dude,” Will shakes his head, “when did you get so bad at consoling people?” Max and Lucas nod in agreement.

“Lecture me all you want, but I got him the best freaking present.” Dustin scowls, rolling his own eyes.

“Uh, we all chipped in remember?” Max sends him a pointed look. All can Mike can do is narrow his eyes at their secrecy.

“Yeah and you now you all owe me ten more dollars!”

“What present?” Mike looks around to the D&D table where a few gifts lay unopened. “Didn’t you guys all bring separate ones?”

Dustin looks around in a panic at his other friends, unsure what to say not to blow his cover. “Oh, um, Steve’s bringing it over later.”

“Well what should we do now?” Will asks. “There’s no point to just sitting around here. Should we just ditch and go to the arcade or something?”

Mike nods, moving to get up off the couch. “That’s not a bad idea-”

“NO!” Dustin shouts, jumping up to block him. But Mike is slightly taller than him, and it’s not hard for him to slip away from him.

“Why not?” Max sends him a look, and Dustin sends a pointed one back, gesturing to the upstairs, and a look of realization came over her face. “No, Mike, we can’t go to the arcade.” she shrugs her shoulder, like four times, and her eyes cross. Dustin puts his head in his hands. Max was a terrible liar.

“Because?” Mike is already grabbing his jacket and heading for the stairs.

“Because you’re grounded. *And I’m just going to kick your ass again at every game.* And we can do that any day.”

Max looks desperately to Lucas, who steps in front of him. “We haven’t had cake and ice cream.” he points out.

“Really? You wanna go get my mom and let her around fire?” Mike raises an eyebrow.

“Good point,” Dustin shakes his finger, “last time I saw her she was gulg gulg gulg...” he says, miming downing a glass and then topping it all by acting dizzy.

“Well then let’s do presents!”

Mike sighs and goes back to sit down on the couch. He was looking forward to just focusing on video games for a couple of hours until he could forget about getting grounded and this stupid party he was only allowed to have with the four of them *because* he was grounded. But the presents, they weren’t bad. They were actually great. Will had drawn a picture of all of their D&D characters, Lucas got him some new dice, and Max got him a pair of roller skates.

“Roller skates? Really?” he asks her as she’s laughing.

“I thought you’d need something to do while you’re grounded.”

“Thanks, zoomer.”

Max is giving him finger guns when they hear his mom yell from the top of the basement stairs, “Mike, Steve’s here! What’s this about, mister? I told you only four friends!”

“Oh, that’s for me!” Dustin rushes up the stairs, “he’s just dropping off a present for Mike.”

“Okay...” Mrs. Wheeler narrows her eyes, “tell Steve I said hello.” And with that she went back to the glass of wine waiting for her in the kitchen.

“Come, my liege!” he gestures to Mike to come up the stairs, and the rest follow.

“What’s this about?” Mike asks as they head for the front door, where they can hear Steve yelling “Hey Dipshits!”

From somewhere in the house, they can hear Mr. Wheeler yell “language!”

Whipping the front door open, Mike’s next accusatory sentence stops. Standing in front of him in pretty yellow dress, is his girlfriend, a stunning smile on her face, holding a birthday cake in her hands, Steve standing behind her, hands on his hips and sunglasses on, looking oh so cocky.

“You- you’re here!” He stutters in amazement, and Max takes the cake from Eleven. “H- how?”

“Happy 14th birthday, brat.” Steve nods, but stops himself. “Oh, wait I forgot something!” He then plops a red bow on El’s brunette locks. She turns to glare at him, but all the other boy does his chew his gum and nod.

“He helped me sneak out.” El whispers for only Mike to hear.

“You didn’t tell *Hopper* ?”

“No, the Chief’s at the station. So this kid has to be home safe and sound by nine. Any later, and then *I* will die, and consequently all of *you* will too. But until then, have fun.”

They sneak El past his mother talking on the phone in the kitchen at a loud volume only alcohol can lead to and his sleeping father down the stairs of the basement. Lucas pulls out Monopoly and Dustin swears revenge, starting an all out war between them. Later when

they're taking a break to eat the cake El made, it's just the two of them on the couch.

"Thanks for coming." He can't help the smile on his face.

She squeezes his hand and kisses him on the cheek. They ignore the catcalling and Max's whooping. "Happy birthday, Mike."

Turns out this party didn't suck so bad after all.

2. "is that my shirt?"

Summary for the Chapter:

Living together comes with ghosts and laundry mishaps.

Notes for the Chapter:

hello again lovelies!

prompt: is that my shirt?

He's not there when she wakes up.

El couldn't be warmer than she is right now, bundled in several layers of blankets stolen from her fiance's side of the bed (he radiates heat, it's one of the million reasons she loves him and it why she harbors no guilt when it comes to stealing,) and more than a couple pairs of socks of her feet. He teases her about the socks, kissing her nose, but she justifies it because it's the dead of winter and the heat in their apartment is that of a run down one bedroom apartment on the edge of Indianapolis. When they went to bed, they went together, and it was snowing outside their window and El watched the white flakes with childlike wonder while Mike held her until she drifted off. But now she finds herself awake and alone. And that scares her.

So she's up that moment, her eyes catching the time on the clock, *4:17 am*, blinking back her in abrasive red light. The doors flies open with the swift motion of her hand and she shuffles her way into the living room. The TV is on, an old movie El doesn't know is playing. Mike's at their small kitchen table, illuminated by a single golden light. He's bent over what looks to be a little blue cube and he's fiddling with the pieces, biting his lip.

"Hey," her voice is quiet as she puts a comforting hand on his shoulder. He reaches and his fingers touch hers, but he doesn't turn around, "what's wrong?"

She knows the answer as it well haunt them for the rest of their lives,

but El wants to know exactly which demons are haunting him so she can chase them away. “Nightmare.” he mumbles and she sits down beside him.

“Do you want to talk about it?” It’s the same question he asks her when she’s the one hiding somewhere in the apartment, panic keeping her frozen, and tears racing down her cheeks when he carries her back to their bed.

“S’not a big deal.” he shakes his head. His attention is solely focused on that blue cube as he tries to fit the pieces a certain way.

“What is that?”

“It’s a puzzle.” there’s a far off look in his face and the rims of his eyes are red and swollen, and something in El burns. What she wouldn’t give to take his pain away. “I found it when we were unpacking.”

The boxes that surround the kitchen and tiny living room are a testament to their struggle of trying to unpack everything in the last few days. They don’t have a lot as they have just begun, but what is there enough and takes up its wanted space.

“Bob gave to Will back in ‘84. And then Will gave it to me.” he yawns and suddenly in the golden light he looks like the twelve year old boy who found her in the woods. She squeezes his hand, and she doesn’t let go.

“Bob?” her voice is barely a whisper, “Who’s Bob?”

“Oh, he- he was Mrs. Byers’ boyfriend the year before you came back. He came to the house after the shadow monster got Will and he was acting all weird, and he brought these puzzles to help him feel better. But he died, El.” his voice chokes, “The monsters- they got him.”

Bob. Bob Newby. She does know the name. She knows because of all the times she heard Joyce crying in her room late at night, Hopper’s face the one of a broken man as he tried to console her. She knows because of the picture on Will’s walls. And she knows because the man haunts her fiance, even if he’s never told her why.

“He was in the lab with us while the monster was controlling Will. I talked to him and he told me all about his job at RadioShack and he founded the AV Club at our middle school. But those- those demogorgons invaded and the lab locked us in, and he went down by himself and restarted the computer so he could get out. But he didn’t make it.” Mike’s eyes were watering and he was trying to wipe them away as fast they came. El took him in his arms as his sobs grew louder.

“Mike,” she whispers his name like a prayer, stroking his hair.

“I only saw his body once, after the monsters and it was only for a second- but El, it’s like that image of him on the floor with blood everywhere, everywhere, it’s *burned* into my brain. And I saw it again, tonight.” he collapses into her, the blue puzzle pieces forgotten and scattered.

“It wasn’t your fault, Mike. It *wasn’t* your fault.” El says, wiping the tears away from his freckled face. “Bob, he lives on. Right here.” she presses her hand over his chest and she can feel his aching heart beating.

The snow continues to drown the outside world as they sit in their broken one. El is holding him to her with all she has, trying to piece him back together like the puzzle that sits in front of him. His sobs echo off the tile floor of their small kitchen. And it has to be enough, that they’re both together and that they live to see the next day, in remembrance of those ones who died so it could be.

Then Mike’s drying his eyes and mumbling an apology, but El shakes her head. She’s about to tell him he doesn’t need to say sorry, that she understands, but then she finds herself giggling despite the pain reverberating around them.

“What is it?” he asks. The confusion on his face is genuine, and El laughs harder.

“Is that my shirt?” she pinches the fabric on him. It’s an old shirt that’s large on her like a flowing dress, El always gets a large size when she buys regular t-shirts for the purpose of sleeping in them. It’s a souvenir, one from last year when they went to a hockey game-

a first for both of them- with a few old college buddies and Mike complained the whole time that he didn't understand the rules of "this stupid sports game." But it was her shirt alright.

His face goes red as he realizes that she's right. "Well- well" he sputters awkwardly, and El knows he's trying not to laugh. "You always wear my stuff. What's wrong with me wearing yours?"

She bursts into laughter and buries her head in his shoulder. "Nothing, nothing at all Mike." He kisses her forehead, tickling her side.

"You were the one who said we should move in together, that means laundry mixing up..."

"I know, I know," El swats at his hands and he's scooping her up, carrying her bridal style and laying her down softly on their bed. "I love it," she whispers, "you in my shirt."

"I love you." he laughs. Then he's pulling all the blankets she hordes over them, to keep the cold and nightmares at bay, and pulling her close. She kisses him on the nose, muttering how she's so lucky to have her own personal heater.

As for the puzzle, well he could finish that tomorrow.

Notes for the Chapter:

sometimes I think about how Bob and Mike probably talked while Will was in the hospital and geeked out over Lord of the Rings (cause it's Sean astin get it- I'll stop now) and dished about AV club and probably really hit it off. It's obvious that Mike was affected by his death (which I'm sTILL MAD ABOUT DUFFERS) and to me it makes sense that his death would stick with Mike long after the lab was shut down.

3. "Slushies aren't just for kids, fuck society"

Summary for the Chapter:

It's the hottest summer they've ever had and Mike's never had a slushie.

Notes for the Chapter:

Mushu voice I LIVE!!!!

Sorry for not posting anything in so long. My computer crashed, my depression was kicking my ass, and I had so much to do to finish the semester! But I'm done, and have nothing else to do, so ta dah!

I'm going to be working on the drabbles here and there (if you want one hmu on tumblr @strangerthanseven) and then I'm working on a big one shot about the Void, as well as the next chapter in the el/kali dinner fic.

"Please tell me that you've waited four years to tell me that your *actual* superpower is making things cooler." moans Mike from the basement couch as he flicks his little hand held fan in desperation it will work more efficiently. It sputters and dies, Mike throwing it to the other side of the couch.

El, laying on the floor on the other side of the basement, her feet propped up on the D&D table, her long curls sprawled around her head like a halo, only has bad news for her boyfriend and his now dead fan. "No, Mike, I can't make things cooler. How would that work, like I could make ice and snow?"

"Ice and snow would be great right now actually. You'd be like Bobby Drake from the X-Men."

"I thought I was Jean Grey." smirks El

"Jean Grey can't make it snow for me right now." Mike mumbles, his voice grumpy.

“I wish I could change for you, Mike.” El smiles up at him from the floor.

“I know.” he smiles back. “But don’t ever, okay?”

“Okay.” El sits up on her elbows, but the smile on her face her dorky boyfriend has put there doesn’t leave. They’ve tried to spend every free moment of the summer together, but with her helping her dad at the station and Mike bagging groceries, it doesn’t amount to as much as they’d like. Still these quiet moments between them are what she lives for, what any summer job can’t take from them.

“I just wish it wouldn’t be so freaking hot!” Mike sits up, shaking his sweat soaked hair like a dog and then running his hand through it.

“You’re pretty hot.” El laughs from down on the floor.

On top of it being their first summer apart because of new summer jobs, the summer of 1987 had also been the warmest on record in Indiana, along with the longest drought in fifty years. They hadn’t seen a drop of rain or a drop in extreme temperatures since the beginning of June, and now August was creeping up on Hawkins. The party, when not working, was running from the dry sun, hiding from the extreme heat with popsicles in the Byers-Hopper kitchen or wasting time at Lucas’ swimming pool. The Wheeler’s basement was avoided at all costs, as the A/C unit for lowermost part of the house had broken down a puff of smoke back at the beginning of July and Ted Wheeler refused to shell the money out as “Mike and all his friends were being hooligans off at the Byers’ place.” The head of the Wheeler house then had to eat his words when the A/C unit for the rest of the house had followed suite last week, and the whole house was cooking his family. Today the rest of the party was working Dustin and Lucas as lifeguards, Will at Radioshack. Max was back in California until school started.

El doesn’t know if Mike’s face was red because of the heat or because he was blushing. Either way, she’s proud of herself. Mike starts to stutter some sort of response, and El breaks down into giggles, making Mike roll his eyes. “Well what do you suggest?” he rolls off the couch and lands next to her with an “umph!”

In that next minute, El loses herself. It's his eyes, she thinks, as she bites her lip, trying to tackle the boy lying next to her. Dark, but they hold light. Just another part of Mike she's in love with.

If she only had the courage to tell him.

Mike is inching closer, his beautiful eyes on her lips, but El sits up. Ignoring the hurt on his face, justifying that it's way too hot in here already to kiss him, and if she kissed him now, she'll surely spill her secret. "Let's get slushies."

"Slushies?" Mike sits up and raises an eyebrow at her.

El nods. "We can bike to the drug store. They have a machine in the back, I go all the time with my dad."

"Let's just drive." Mike grabs her keys from the D&D table and follows her up the basement stairs. "It's way too hot to bike."

"Really, Mike? You hadn't mentioned the temperature."

-

El trips over her sneakers getting out of the passenger seat. She steadies herself before she hits the hot pavement, grateful Mike is the only one to see her use her powers. He fusses over her, like he always does, but El just takes his hand and drags him into the store. The cool air hits them like a wave, her boyfriend sighing in relief.

"Air, finally! El, call my parents, tell them I'm not coming home."

The take their time getting to the back, walking up and down each aisle because Mike wants to enjoy the air conditioning. "What flavor are you going to get?" she asks him as they reach the machine in the back.

Mike rubs the back of his neck. "I dunno what's good. I've never had one."

"You've *never* had one?" gasps El. He shakes his head in response. "Wait a second, I've had something that Michael Wheeler has never had? My, my, how the turntables!"

“It’s how the tables turn, El.”

“You’re changing the subject! I just think it’s weird, okay? Because usually you’re the one showing me things and explaining things, and now I get to show you something.” The smile on her face hurts. She knows that something as silly as the slushie machine in the back of a convenience store carries the weight of all the wonders he’s introduced her to, but a girl can hope. At least it will cool him down, if nothing.

“Get the cola flavor.” El points to the machine, handing him one of the large plastic cups. “It’s the best. Or green apple is good.”

There’s a look of hesitation on his freckled face. He stays where stands, watching El get her own cup and head toward the slushie machine. “What flavor are you going to get?”

“All of them.” El pulls the knob of the blue raspberry, watching as the fluffy blue liquid filled the bottom of her cup. Then she moved onto cherry, not noticing the look of pure shock in her boyfriend’s eyes.

“You can do *that?*” Mike asks in disbelief. He’s then by her side, following the same pattern his girlfriend takes.

“Hey!” El swats at his hand when he gets to the cola flavor before her. “You stole my idea!”

“Only because it’s brilliant!” he bends down and kisses her nose, and El can’t help but forgive the dorky boy in front of her.

They pay, Mike handing the smoking cashier a ten dollar bill and saying nothing when El slips a five in his pocket, and take their slushies with them as they sit down on the hot pavement of the crumbling sidewalk.

“So why have you never had a slushie?” El asks after taking a long sip. She throws her head back to look at the sky, once a beacon of pure heat, now covered by a dark clouds and she almost sighs in relief. *Rain! Thank god!*

“I don’t know, Mom always thought they had too much sugar in them.” Mike shrugged, taking his own sip. He gets the rush of

multiple flavors sending a cold shock through his body. It's what he's needed all day. "But this is so good, I'm kicking myself for not doing this before."

"Oh really? I'm surprised you just didn't get one the second you were out on your own, Mr. Rebel." El punches his shoulder lightly, feeling that rush of happiness that comes with getting him to laugh.

"Mom thought—" El raises an eyebrow, "fine! I thought they were just for kids or something. You know, that's what I thought society or something thought." Mike finally admits.

El scoffs, rolling her eyes. "Slushies aren't just for kids, fuck society."

"If by fuck society, you mean my mom, then yeah, sure El." Mike snorts.

"Who am I, Max's brother?"

What El hadn't taken into consideration with her next comment was that her boyfriend had just taken a long sip from his multi-slushie, because now it was all over his face as he had completely snorted and launched it out of his mouth trying not to choke of his laughter. "El!" he shouted, effectively spraying more slushie everywhere, his shoulders still shaking as he tried not to laugh, "that came out my nose! It's not funny!"

El had fallen into the street, she was laughing so hard, just about to the point where she almost couldn't breathe and was going to die soon if she didn't stop. "Then why are you laughing?" she managed to get out between joyful wheezes.

"I'm not-stop it, El!" he tried to say, and more slushie flew everywhere, sending her into another fit of giggles.

"It came out your nose!" she cackled, clutching her stomach.

"Why- why would you even say something like that?" Mike asked, simultaneously wiping the melted slush from his face and rolling his eyes.

"You know it's true! It's what happened." El reminded him. Then she

took a deep breathe and sip of her own drink. Mike put his head in his sticky hands.

“I still can’t *believe* it happened. And that she told me about it, too!”

“This nice young man came to the house,” El began in her best Mrs. Wheeler voice, throwing her head back for drama, “and he was *very* interested in where you all were. But he was the nicest looking boy, flirting with me like that-

“Stop it, stop it, stop it!” Mike pushed her with his shoulders, hands over his ears, and El rolled her eyes, because he was totally laughing and would never admit it. “Of all the things that happened that night, Billy fucking Hargrove putting the moves on my mom is still the most unbelievable. And still the grossest! And that’s after Dustin put a dead demodog in Mrs. Byers’ fridge!”

It took a few minutes for them both to calm down, each taking deep breaths before they would look at each other and start laughing again, but now as El looked up at the gathering clouds in the sky, lightning flashed as she took another sip of her slushie. She felt a storm coming. *You should just tell him now, that you love him-*

It was then her boyfriend opened his mouth and said, “I caught my mom staring at the A/C mechanic’s ass today. Wondered if it looked like Billy’s.”

Mike spends the rest afternoon teasing El about her spit take after his comment about the mechanic’s ass, and how slushie totally came out her nose and how it took her twenty minutes to stop laughing and how revenge was totally better than a slushie, El sticking her tongue out whenever he teased her.

Even though there was lightning, and there was thunder, it never did rain. The clouds dissipated and the unbearable heat returned. Oh well, El thought when she was kissing Mike goodbye later, she could tell him she loved him when the next storm came.

Notes for the Chapter:

hi my name is savannah, I'm 18, and I never fucking

learned how to do characterization.

(did y'all like my office joke?)

4. "don't touch me, we're fighting"

Summary for the Chapter:

El's done something unspeakable.

Notes for the Chapter:

hello. it's me again! be ready for this cause it's pretty rough. Like Liability by Lorde rough.

This is the longest she hasn't spoken to Mike in almost three years. Because before this, they'd been a force completely inseparable, nothing, not a single thing in the goddamn universe could keep them apart, not a dimension full of monsters, not a corrupt government rotting in conspiracies. Nothing. Except this.

It's been fifteen hours since they've said anything to each other, an impressive record given they live in a one bedroom apartment in a small town outside the university. She wanders the length of their tiny kitchen, just an oven and two burners for a stove, a mini fridge with a freezer stuffed with Eggo's and junkfood. There's no dishwasher. They've spent hours at the sink that's too small even for their amazing lack of dishes, talking endlessly about their day: their jobs that don't pay enough, their classes that work them too hard, their future that they've planned to the last detail from where they'll live together, who'll they'll be, *together*, down to the ring on her finger that she twists as she walks the cold tiles, up and down, pacing in a way that would drive him crazy. But this time he's not even looking. He's not even here.

Their fights are chaotic masterpieces. She hates every single one, rare as they are, they tear her and break her into a million pieces, because each time there's this wall with him she can't quite take down. He's loud, giving into his raging temper, and she breaks things, no other way to communicate her anger. The yell and throw words like knives at each other, storming out of rooms, slamming the door to bedroom, the apartment, running off until the other catches them breaking down in tears. And they just fall into each other, whispering "I'm sorry" into shoulders, and then they talk. They fix the faulty

communication, and they fix the things they break. Always.

El's not sure she can stand the quiet of the apartment without him here. She wants the yelling, the screaming, breaking things. Not the silence of nothing. It's consuming her, a painful throbbing reminder of the actions she cannot take back. Angry at the story's background characters, when she's the one to blame. And everytime she closes her eyes she see him again, the look of betrayal in his eyes and shock on his face, as he backs away from her outstretched hands, only saying one thing.

"Don't touch me."

And then he leaves. He doesn't slam the door, and she doesn't chase him, because she hears the start of his motorcycle and the sound of him running away, and she almost throws up, can't face the reality that he might not come back.

His name is Robert. A stockbroker who had just moved to Hawkins. Divorced, two kids of his own, in some unknown college. El knew nothing of him, just the sound bites of gossip she'd gathered from around town. She didn't know about his money, or his nice car, the tailored black suits and his past full of white lies. She only knew enough to recognize him as he was sneaking out of the Mrs. Wheeler's bedroom, shoes in hand, shirt unbuttoned. And he didn't even notice her, standing bewildered in the kitchen, as he simply walked out of the house, as if he owned the place.

Mrs. Wheeler had come out of her bedroom, still tying her bathrobe around her waist, her hair and makeup telling of her sins, when her eyes had gone wide at the sight of El standing there, having caught her. "You can't- you can't tell anyone okay?"

El's voice was quiet as she asked "That you're having an affair?"

"It was a one time thing!" Mrs. Wheeler said, almost too quickly.

"What about Mr. Wheeler?" Ted Wheeler had been gone from his usually spot in the La-Z-boy, out on one of his many business trips that were becoming all too frequent.

"Oh, like you think he has doesn't the same bullshit to me, with that slut of a secretary up in Chicago?" snapped Mrs. Wheeler, and El jumped at her snarl. "Excuse me for indulging, *once*."

"You can't keep doing this." the younger woman shook her head.

The snarl was back, her hand on her hip, poised ready to kill. Mrs. Wheeler had never been unkind to her, but this, this was new. "It doesn't matter what I do, okay! The only thing that matters about tonight is that you tell no one, okay? *No one.*"

"Mike—"

"No! You don't tell Mike. Or Nancy, or Holly. You don't tell anyone." El should have known not to listen. She should've had turned away right then and gone to get Mike, paying no mind to Mrs. Wheeler or her wishes. She wouldn't have, until "Look, I'm sorry, El, that you had to see this. But this isn't your mess, it's mine." Mrs. Wheeler took a deep breath. "I should be the one to tell Mike, to tell all of them. I won't ask that of you."

And so El waited, going right back to her life in Indianapolis, waiting for the phone call to come and preparing to the person Mike would need her to be when the news came. She waited for six months.

Karen Wheeler had called yesterday morning and Mike picked up their landline like it was nothing. They'd been doing the dishes, side by side, like always and forever- or so she thought.

"What's she calling about?" El asked over her shoulder, elbows deep in fluffy dish soap. Mike said nothing in response, so she walked over, her hands still soaking. The expression on Mike's face she couldn't read.

"Mike, please don't be upset about this, it's been coming for a long time." Mrs. Wheeler was saying, "but we're happier this way. I'll be with Robert and your father can be with... whomever he pleases."

Oh.

"So you're just running off with this man?" Mike's voice broke as he ran a hand through his hair. "How- how long has this been

happening?"

There was a sigh on the other line. "Since April.

" *Since April?* April- you've been *cheating* on Dad and you're just telling me now? Were you ever going to tell me, if Robert hadn't told you to get a divorce?"

"Honey, please calm down, you're making this a bigger deal than it needs to be. Because for the record, your father- has done *much* worse. And, and besides, El knew and I thought she was going to tell you."

Ice flooded her veins, and her stomach dropped. Mike looked at her, mouth agape and eyes begging her, *please, please tell me it's not true.* El could feel tears of panic pricking her eyes and she struggled to take another breath.

"Michael," Karen Wheeler's voice was forgotten as Mike stared at his fiancee, "take some time and think this over. Please don't do anything rash. I'll call again soon." The next sound was the dial tone, lasting forever and a complete second.

"You- you knew?" Mike choked on his voice.

"Yes, please Mike-" El begged, reaching out from him.

But he took a step back, shaking his head. "Don't touch me."

And then he was gone, and she let him leave. Sliding down the kitchen wall and collapsing onto the tile floor, she lets her tears take her in hopes they would wash away the monstrous guilt, ringing out around her like the sobs that echoed in the apartment's silence.

Fifteen hours he's gone. Fifteen hours since they've said anything to each other. She thinks, in the midst of her pain, to call someone, her dad, Joyce, maybe even Nancy. No, El decides, she wants to talk to Mike first. *Please come home,* she reaches out her mind, trying desperately to find him, but he never answers only keeping her out, away, *Mike I'm so sorry.*

You should have just told him, the voice in her head berates her, the

self abuse filling up the entire space now that no one exists to silence it, you complete and stupid fool! Imagine how awful he must be feeling. Why did you even do it? For Mrs. Wheeler's approval? Did you seriously believe her when she said she would do it herself? He loved you, you monster! And you lied to him!

"Friends don't lie," she sobs, like she's 12 instead of 23, like it will fix the damage she has done.

El starts to wonder in desperation if there is anyway to save them. They spent three hundred and fifty lonely nights apart and then vowed never again. Every waking moment they weren't forced apart, they were together. They'd gone to college together, they moved in together, and now they were supposed to be getting married.

There is no way in hell he'll marry her now, not when she's lied to him like this. The thought of how unfair all this is does cross her mind. She doesn't see why that just because the Wheeler's marriage is imploding doesn't mean hers has to before it's even begun. This, all the lies, the deceit, the fake smiles and fake apologies, this is why Nancy and Jonathan had never gotten married. Not after they'd had two fabulous examples of how disastrous trusting someone enough to marry them could be. It was only fair that Mike now felt the same.

Maybe he will come back, El reasons, and he'll still want a future, but he just won't want to get married. No- not after a betrayal as sharp as this. And besides, *she* wants to marry him. She wants the vows, his name, the promise for all it's worth.

But what she wants doesn't even matter now.

He loved you, and you lied to him.

The dishes still aren't done. And now it's been sixteen hours.

Notes for the Chapter:

please validate me

5. "I NE E D A SEQUEL TO THE DON'T TOUCH ME FIC PLEASE"

Summary for the Chapter:

Mike has to go home. sequel to "don't touch me"

Notes for the Chapter:

@ everyone who came back and said Mike needs to come home and that I should do a sequel: I love y'all. This is for you.

this is also for the person who came to my inbox and gave me this message: " I NE E D A SEQUEL TO THE DON'T TOUCH ME FIC PLEASE." you have inspired the chapter title, after all, that was the prompt.

It's been sixteen hours since Mike walked away from El.

It's become a habit to count his experiences with El. He counts everything with her, they both do. The 353 days they waited to see each other. Seven years since he told her he loved her, tripping over his feet and words, seven years since she said "I love you" right back. 729 dates. 6 school dances. Hundreds of little notes left in lunches, on the fridge, snuck into pockets of clothes. One little apartment on the edge of Indianapolis. And three massive fights, now four.

Sixteen hours since he's been with her, kissed her, heard her voice and her laugh, sixteen hours since he's seen her, her face contorted in painful guilt and shock, her eyes begging him please, please don't go.

But he had to get out, he had to leave and get away from her as far as he could and as fast he could. He has his keys in his pocket, so he's on his bike and flying down the highway, driving into the night of city, no intention of going anywhere but away. Driving for what feels like days, thoughts racing through his mind a reminder of the way everything he's ever known has fallen apart, and that what has never been strong is only destined to break.

24 years of marriage, all a spectacular illusion, a show put on for an audience of a gullible believers. It ends in as it began, one simple mistake after another.

Just how long would it take before he and El were exactly where his Mom and Dad were?

As he drives down another unknown road, all he can think about is that cold November night back in 83, when they found Will's "fake" body in the quarry lake. The anger of her betrayal was all consuming; he *trusted* her, put his faith in her when she had said Will was alive, went against his best friends and followed her anyway. And none of it, not a word she said, brought Will home that night. All it brought him was a dead friend.

Why, *why*, would she lie to him, and how could she lie, when their whole world together was built off one single commandment: friends don't lie? And about this? Mike tries and tries and tries but he can't figure it out, the love of his life, keeping the secret that destroys his family? How did El even know? Why would his mom tell her and not him? El and his mother got along, but they'd never been close, not in anyway that would matter.

Mike pulls his motorcycle over. He's in some broken part of the city, illuminated by neon lights and littered with broken bottles, and he stumbles into a bar, full of people, mistakes, and regret. One glance at the bartender and Mike's newest idea of getting drunk out of his damn mind is obliterated. It's not like he has a ride home, or one he wants to see right now.

"Do you have a phone?" he yells over the crowd at the man attending the bar. The other man squints at him, but gestures over to the back.

He wants to call her. He wants to demand an answer, accuse her, and fight with her, anything, anything at all. Because he just wants to hear her voice.

No. Not right now. Anger is addictive, he finds, and seductive. It seems to promise that if Mike stays angry with El, something, *anything*, maybe El, will fix what has been shattered. Even if it is a lie. His fingers dial a familiar number, and he holds the cold receiver up to

his ear.

“Hello?”

“Nancy? It’s me, Mike.”

“Mike? Oh. That means you heard.”

“I did. I- I don’t know what to do.” he sighs, running a hand that’s shaking as much as his voice.

Nancy clicks her tongue. “You don’t have to do anything. This has been coming for a long time.”

“You sound like Mom.” Mike snaps. He’s ready to put down the phone, Nancy’s just like the rest of them.

“Not just the divorce, Mike, the whole thing. Mom cheating on Dad, Dad cheating on Mom, it’s been happening for a long time.”

“What do you mean?” asks Mike. “What did Dad even do? Mom kept saying that what Dad did was worse, but she never said *what* it was.”

“I talked to Mom for a while when she called. She’s pissed because Dad was seeing some woman from his company when she was pregnant with Holly. Dad cut it off when the woman demanded he leave Mom and us and be with her, but Dad was only ever doing it because he could get away with it. Mom knew and forgave him back when Holly was born, but apparently she thought Dad was cheating on her again because he was going up to Chicago so often. I guess in her mind it was enough to justify sleeping with Robert.” Nancy explains. She pauses and Mike hears Jonathan say something.

“What about Holly? What’s going to happen to her?”

There was a pause and then, “I think Holly will be okay. She’s grown up with Mom and Dad always fighting, and she knows about Mom’s drinking. If anybody was ready for this, it was Holly.”

“It’s not fair for her.” Mike shakes his head, on the verge of tears. He can remember Will, tired from the nights his parents kept him up, unconsolable by nobody except Jonathan when his dad walked out

because he thought it was his fault. And Dustin, crying on the playground the day his dad didn't come home, close to Mr. Clarke and Steve because he didn't have a father figure. Max, who was thrown into an abusive step family when her mom and dad decided to separate. Mike didn't want any of that for his younger sister.

"You're right, it isn't. That's exactly what I told Mom but of course she didn't want to hear any of it. But I told Holly that if Mom is still going to leave, she can come live with me and Jonathan for a little while. And that offer will still stand even if Mom kicks Dad out of the house and just takes it for her and Robert." finishes Nancy, leaving Mike want to hit himself repeatedly in the head with the receiver.

"This is so fucked up, Nancy."

"Yep. But we have no say in it. Mom and Dad made their bed, and now they have to sleep it in it- just not together, I guess. You should just keep moving with your life. Finish your student teaching and plan your wedding-"

"There might not be a wedding." It was like a wave, the anger and bitterness back in his lungs, fighting his internal want to be with El. He had snapped, the tears back in his eyes, and the desire to hang up and run away was strong.

"What? Why? What happened?"

Taking a deep breath, Mike attempts to speak without all consuming emotion. "El knew about Mom's affair. She's known the whole time and she didn't tell me!"

Nancy is silent for a minute, Mike counts the seconds, and then, "How did El know? Mom said this was the first time she told anyone, she didn't even tell Dad until a week ago."

"Mom just said she was telling me now because she thought El would have told me before because she knew. El lied to me! I can't even look at her, Nancy, I'm at some bar in the shittiest part of town because I just can't be with her right now. I should just call the wedding off, obviously if she's going to keep lying then I might as well just save us the heartbreak and divorce-"

“That’s bullshit.” Nancy growls and Mike can hear the anger through her voice. “Mike that’s bullshit and you know it, damn it! I don’t know why El lied to you, okay, but she has a side to the story. A side you seem to be forgetting, you heartless jackass!”

“It doesn’t matter *why* she lied to me, it just matters that she did! This- this- how could she have a side to this of all things! My life has basically fallen apart!” Mike shouts into the phone, several bar patrons look his way, and drunk on anger, he flips them off.

“No, Mike, this isn’t the end of the freaking world! How could you, a person who’s seen the end of the world *multiple times*, act like this? Your life will keep going Mike. You will keep going, just like the rest of us. What you’re not going to do is throw away the best thing that’s ever happened to you because somebody else made a mistake!”

“How could you say that to me? Shit like this is the reason you and Jonathan didn’t get even married, you didn’t want to end up like Mom and Dad, remember? Maybe I don’t want to either, Nancy!”

“Stop being a dumbass for twelve seconds Michael and actually listen to me. You and El aren’t like Mom and Dad and you aren’t going to end up like them!” shouts Nancy. Mike feels like they’re twelve and fifteen again, screaming at each other in a challenge to see who can be the most aggravated.

“Why? What proof do you have that we aren’t going to be like everybody else?” he yells, tears running down his face.

“Because you love each other!” Nancy screams so loud people sitting at the nearest tables turn around and stare at Mike. “Mom and Dad never loved each other. Not even on day one. As soon as you wrap your head around that, I promise this will be easier to understand. And you’ll understand that you and El are different because you have *always* loved each other.”

Mike runs his hands through his hair, his hands shaking, his whole world falling, *what have I done, what have I done, what have I done?* He loves El so much it makes it so he can’t breathe. Her smile, her wit, her laugh. It’s all he’s ever wanted. He could be poor and sick for the rest of his life and she would make him rich. It’s why he rehearsed a

speech in the bathroom mirror and completely blew it when he got down on one knee and dropped the ring box trying to explain to her just *how much* he loved her. How he'd loved her from day one. How he'd love her long after the last one. "I don't know how to fix this, Nancy."

"Yes, you do." his sister replies, her voice calm. "Now go home to El."

Mike was wrong, about that night in 83. He remembers as he drives home, weaving in and out of the cars as fast as he can because he needs get home to her. El had never lied about Will. She just didn't know how to explain where he was.

The other problem was that he didn't let her. All he did was get angry, and yell, more than once. He gave into his emotions, and he had let them dictate his actions, just as he had after getting the phone call. But even after all the terrible things he'd spit at her when he had snapped, she still searched for a way to show him that Will was out there, that he was okay. He doubts he'll get as lucky this time around, but he has to try.

When he gets back to the apartment, it's been eighteen hours. Eighteen of the most painful hours in his life. The door is unlocked, and for a brief second Mike panics, worried somebody could have broken in and hurt El, until he remembers he lives with a powerful telekinetic who takes no shit and can throw people through walls.

She's probably going to throw me through the wall. I deserve it.

All the lights are off with the exception of one, the light in the kitchen that hangs right above their small sink, where the dishes they were doing before his mom called have been abandoned. Mike walks the lonely hall into their bedroom.

El is sleeping on his side of the bed, clutching his pillow with white knuckles. Kneeling next her, he gently pushes a stray curl behind her ear. Eyes red and puffy, her left hand clamped around something.

Mike pulls her fingers apart one by one to find her engagement ring. He bought it down the street at a pawn shop off the cheapest rack, hoping that she would still say yes even if it didn't have any diamonds. It's then he realizes just how unfair he's been to her. He almost walked away from the greatest thing that's ever, ever, happened to him, to anyone.

He's standing up, ready to let her sleep and walking out the door, when he hears her quiet voice stop him. "Mike?"

A dam inside him shatters, and hot tears roll down his face. "Hey," he whispers, wiping the tears and turning to face her.

"You came back." El says the words as if she doesn't believe them. "Even after- even after I—" her voice cracks and she folds in on herself, her body shaking as she cries. Mike crosses the room at a superhuman speed because he can't hold her quick enough.

"Hey, hey," he strokes her hair, rocking her, "you didn't do anything."

Her sobs crescendo in the quiet empty atmosphere of their bedroom, and he holds her tighter. "Yes I did. I lied to you."

"It's okay, I- I don't care about that. I don't care about any of it." Mike whispers as she shakes against him.

"You need to know the truth." All of a sudden she's backing away from him, wiping her eyes and nose on her sleeve. "I caught your Mom and Robert back in April. When we were there for spring break. I was going to just tell you, but your mom- she just, she said that I shouldn't have to do it, and that she would. So I waited, and I'm sorry."

Realization sets in as Mike puts his head in his hands, along with a new simmering anger. "So she made you take the blame, instead of her just taking responsibility?" Why, why would his mom do that?

El nods, burying her head in his shoulder. But Mike shakes his head. "She shouldn't have done that, El. And I... I shouldn't have walked out on you."

"She wouldn't have had to do anything if I'd just been honest with you." Tears gleam in El's eyes again and he's wiping old ones off her cheek.

"It's not your fault, El. Mom lied to you and then she lied about lying about it. But I should have at least listened to your side of the story before I got angry. I'm so sorry."

They fall into a comfortable silence, just the two of them, the only people in the world, holding each other, healing each other. And then, Mike swallows his fear and asks, because he has to ask sometime, "El, you'll still marry me, right?"

El, the love and light of his life, his soulmate, his forever, looks at him with her wide brown eyes. "You still want to marry me? I thought- I thought that because your mom and your dad, they, they're splitting up, that you wouldn't want to anymore."

"I was scared El, scared of becoming like them. But that's just an excuse. Just because they're living a shit show doesn't mean we can't have the future we've always planned."

The smile on her face seems to heal all the broken pieces of the last eighteen excruciating hours, all of the mistrust and anger of growing in a household long vacant of love. "Yes, Mike, I'll marry you."

He takes her face and his hands, their foreheads touching. "You're amazing, you know that?" Mike chokes on his words. And he'll always remember the way she laughs when he kisses her and asks "Do you want to help me finish the dishes?"

Notes for the Chapter:

office reference I'll find some fic to stick in eventually: "You know how when you're a kid you think your parents are soulmates? my kids are going to be right about that." -Pam Beesly, and probably Mike Wheeler.

Author's Note:

more to come! mwah!-Savannah